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SUBJECT: Dayana Martinez: Disabled Garifuna Advocate Seeks Liberal Party Congressional Seat to Advocate for Change

1. Summary: Blind, black, and female, Dayana Martinez, a Garifuna, hopes to be given an opportunity to represent the marginalized groups of Honduras. Campaigning for a seat in the November 27 congressional elections, Ms. Martinez promises to fight for children's rights and to bring forth legislation that will improve their standard of living. The Liberal Party hopes that Ms. Martinez's campaign will attract a large number of new voters to her campaign and their party, voters who have previously not had a voice in the National Congress. Her campaign focuses on three issues: (1) combating discrimination against marginalized populations, (2) improving rural education through technology, and (3) pushing legislation that ensures equal employment opportunities for the disabled. End Summary.

2. Garifuna (Afro-Honduran) Ms. Dayana Giselle Martinez Burke lost her sight at age 15 due to medical negligence. Although blind, she has still been able to see her way to her international and political aspirations. She completed high school in the United States and earned a bachelor's degree in foreign languages from the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH). Proficient in five languages, Ms. Martinez is also the founder of the National Association for the Handicapped of Honduras and has served as United Nations human rights investigator for people with disabilities in Honduras. She is also working with the UN to prepare an international convention for people with disabilities.

3. In the Liberal Party (LP) primary, Martinez was one of only two winning congressional candidates in the Francisco Morazan Department (Tegucigalpa) not on the slate of presidential nominee Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, who won the LP presidential primary. That demonstrates an impressive ability to attract votes for a candidate on a slate whose presidential candidate (Gabriela Nunez) finished third in the department. As candidate number 20 in a 23 candidate district for the general election, her chances of being elected are probably more dependent on personal support than on Zelaya's showing.

4. Her support of legislation to protect and improve the lives of Honduras' numerous street children (over 5,300 in Tegucigalpa alone) has galvanized higher than expected support from women's groups, which likely helped her at the ballot box. Seeking to unite all Hondurans under a cause, Ms. Martinez promises to fight for children's rights and to bring forth legislation that will improve their living conditions and education to better integrate them into positive aspects of Honduran society.

5. According to 2002 figures from the National Institute of Statistics (INE), 177,516 disabled individuals live in Honduras, the majority in rural areas, many of whom feel that the government has abandoned them. It is to this under-represented group (as well as blacks, women, and ethnic minorities) that Ms. Martinez is looking for support on election day. Many members of these marginalized communities feel that the government has abandoned them. The Liberal Party hopes that Ms. Martinez's campaign will attract a large number of new voters to her campaign and their party; voters who have previously not had a voice in the National Congress.

6. Her campaign focuses on three keys issues which she hopes will have an immediate and long-term impact on the social conditions of the most destitute: combating discrimination against all Honduran minorities, including women; improving rural education through technology, especially in Garifuna districts; and implementing laws to ensure equal employment opportunities for disabled individuals, similar to those of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

7. Comment: The marginalized groups, after so many years without a voice in the national agenda, have found someone to carry their concerns and aspirations to the National Congress. If successful on November 27, the people and the government will hear them from Martinez. End Comment.

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